Too Dead
No use at present

Civil Service in the Great North-West

By R.J.Gillis - Accounting Dept, Public Works

Leading up to my subject it might be of interest to refer to the first seat of Government located at Livingstone on Snake Creek, as it was locally called, by the late Hon. David Laird in 1877. The civil servants there were mostly Dominion Employees, N.W.M. Police, Indian Dept. A few years after the Capital was moved to Battleford and finally to Regina, where the North-West Council was formed to work in conjunction with the Lieut Governor, who on some occasions wanted to be the "pooba", resulting in disruptions of one kind or other. However, with the setting up of a Legislative Assembly matters were conducted more along democratic lines. In those days the Civil Service was not large but with increased grants from Ottawa, which were never very large, and increased revenue more work was undertaken. Consequently there was an increase in the Civil Service. Salaries were very low, and few concessions, but in those days it was quite an honor to work for the government.

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When I joined the service of the North-West government in 1901, the offices were in the old Indian Dept. Bldg on Dewdney St about a mile out of town, at that time then the total number of the service would be about 56, and the administration covered the 4 districts, now comprising the

Provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta. In 1904 the offices were moved down town to the top storey of the Regina Trading Co. During the winter of 1905 negotiations for the setting up of two provinces for the area covered by the districts of Assiniboia, Saskatchewan, Alberta and Athabasca under the name of Saskatchewan and Alberta, with Regina and Edmonton as respective provisional capitals.

In the spring Liquidators arrived from Ottawa and we had a very busy season taking stock and distributing to each province its proper share, also dividing the files and all records. By August everything was in good shape. Inauguration for the Province of Saskatchewan was in Regina on Sept. 5th, and at Edmonton ~~a week later~~. Sept 1st 1905.

Being one of those selected for Edmonton, was quite pleased, as I was in Edmonton first in 1891 working on the C & E Ry from Red Deer to South Edmonton and it greatly appealed to me. We arrived here on Sept. 7, 1905, the main quarters being two floors of the Empire Building which was nearing completion. We were still short of room and a couple of offices were obtained on Jasper and one in the old Thistle Rink on 102 St. north of Jasper. In this old land mark, which was afterwards destroyed by fire, was held the opening of the first Legislature of Alberta with all the pomp of the mother of Parliaments. The sessions of this Legislature were held in the Assembly room of MacKay Ave

school. In this assembly of 25 members there were only two in opposition, and even they did not always agree owing to differences with their leader. One of the bills presented at this session was a bill to establish a university in Edmonton, certainly a great move along educational lines. The locating of a permanent capital was a controversial subject, Calgary, Red Deer and Edmonton making a strong plea but after long discussion and the vote taken, Edmonton won out.

The next session of the Legislature was held in the building now used as Government Garage at rear of Terrace Bldg. At this session the big fight was on over the Alberta and Waterways Railway, and resulted in the overthrow of the Rutherford Govt. in which a group of insurgents took an active part. Subsequent sessions were held in the new Legislature Bldgs.

In 1908 we ~~the civil servants~~ vacated the Empire Bldg and moved to the Terrace Bldg at the foot of 106 St. where we remained until we moved to the new Parlaiment Bldg. about 1912.

Later owing to creation of new Departments and increase in staff, the Administration Bldg. on 109 St. was built. In view of the large increase in the service and the fact that many grievances existed with no way of adjusting ,

a general meeting was called and dispite great opposition a Civil Service Association was instituted in 1919. Some of the ministers were quite hostile and threatened to dismiss any of their staff joining same. Great results did not come by "sudden flight" but while many slept, Executive Committees were toiling upward in the night to achieve the heights to which we have arisen. We have a strong membership and various committees including a joint council of Civil Servants and members of the Cabinet, where grievances of various kinds can be ironed out. Many of the advantages achieved are , Statutory increases, promotions within the service, sick leave, superannuation, life, fire and auto Insurance, hospitalization.

No doubt to many, this may not be a very interesting narrative, but as we look back over the years of hardship and pioneering, we marvell that we have reached the position we find ourselves in today. And as we look forward into the future, realizing the all important part this north western country of ours is destined to play in world affairs, we realize it must still be our purpose to build up men, who harbor in their breast a desire to conquer when they meet a mansized test. The spirit of the West must still be, to hoe your own row and then stop and pull a weed or two

which check your fellowmen - that kind of thing requires some sand and some fail in the test. But that is the moral status and the spirit of the West. In facing our task today we require that spirit and we should strive to possess and exercise it.

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Some Of The Stories Gathered On The Way

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Some of we Civil Servants think we may be fairly good politicians but we better not fool ourselves. There was a man who thought he could work the wires irrespective of what party was in power. He had been playing a half way game. However the government he worked for was defeated, and when the new premier took office, he went to see him, and after formal congratulations, he said "Now that you have entered into your Kingdom, I hope you will not forget me", the premier said "Get thee behind me Satan, I never knew you."

Another old Scot in the service during N.W. days was organist in Knox Church. Strange to say, being a Scot he was fond of a dram and on this Saturday night he had imbibed freely, as a matter of fact, he had some effect on the Sabbath. So instead of playing the usual processional, he broke out with "The Campbells are coming". Hard on the Auld Kirk folk.

Another, was a Canadian and Englishman who got into a mix up in the office one day and tried some pugilistic stunts. The Canadian downed the Englishman flat on the floor and was giving it to him right and left, when the Englishman shouted "D-- you, get off or I'll knock you down."